

5/30/94 10 p.m.

**Reflections on the ESLPE given today:**

Today some 450 students took the AUA English Placement examination; it was the fourth time that the test (having only two forms and now two other mixed forms) has served as a placement instrument and the same test has been used five other times as a final evaluation instrument.

I have already stated my objections to its continued use to evaluate students who have gone through our English for Special Academic Purposes courses, and I have made my suggestions for its replacement. Here I will only note some of the difficulties that attended this day's event.

1. The students were held in the auditorium and in the hall outside for two hours before the test itself because there was only one person checking their ID. Insuring that the applicants for the test are the same people who handed in their application papers is not the English Department's business, but two hours wait did not improve the testing situation and there must be a better way.

Last year there were three people handling ID. One problem was that one of the registrar's three workers was taking the exam. There must be a way around this bottle-neck.

2. AUA has long known that there was to be a large number of applicants for the test, yet the number of boards for them to write upon was never increased. At the last moment, we had to gather cafeteria trays and library periodicals so that test-takers had something to write upon.

3. It is unnecessary to have the original scheduled day for the test and the last day for applications to be one working-day apart: we did not know the actual figures of test-takers until Friday, the 27th.

4. The organization of the printing of the test needs to be re-examined. The original request for 500 copies of a 21 page exam was placed on Wednesday evening with the copy-center with directions to have only the copy-center assistant director and

his helper to have access to them, but on Friday morning, we were apprised of the necessity of either Virgil Strohmeyer or Patricia Boyle being present throughout the printing process. Whether this is an appropriate use of our time is of some importance, but in any case, the machine used for the copying (the Gestetner) necessitated a long and error prone process of hand collation and stapling. The copy-center has new collating xerox machines and these would have been well used to copy the exams and to increase security as well (security being as much a function of the time the exams are outside of a safe as any other factor).

It should also be noted here that despite frequent requests for lockable files, the English Department has never had sufficient secure space to keep tests and other valuable items at one and the same time.

Many AUA employees have applied for entrance into AUA programs, and this includes the head of the copy center, the English Department secretary and one of our English faculty. This has complicated matters, and there needs to be procedures in place to insure that any department's functioning is not endangered by workers becoming AUA applicants.

5. Communication and coordination between different parts of the process have not been good; besides problems already noted, there are the following:

a. I was never told directly or in writing that the test time was noon rather than the normal (all other tests') 10 a.m.

b. I was not informed until the last possible second that my own faculty and former faculty would have to take the test if they were trying to enter an AUA college; last year this was not the case and I had no information to the contrary by word or in writing. Since they had already been prepared to grade the test, their having taken it, denied me needed personnel for that laborious process; moreover, as instructors who had graded and proctored the exam numerous times, having them take it seems an exercise more in futility than sense.

c. The traditional date for this test has been the last Saturday of May and it was so noted to the administration. It was not until the last week that this was changed because that day was an Armenian holiday, but even then it falls upon an American holiday.

6. Why are students expelled from the English program for cheating or others who have failed the test repeatedly allowed to take the test time and again? At least, in the latter case, there should be some other test that might be given, for the accuracy of the assessment of a student who has taken the same test three times is rarely the number of the grade of the last attempt.

7. The inevitable and fated glitches occurred: the tape had a bad segment, the lights went out for almost five minutes, test-takers ignored instructions although they were endlessly repeated, pages were missing from a few test booklets, people left without writing their names on their papers, and even one surprising fellow wrote his essay on the back pages of the library journal he was given as a substitute for a test-board; we can live through these with ease.

I would also like to reflect on the test's 'test-worthiness:'

1. The test has never been as secure as on this occasion: the newly arranged multiple choice questions were kept on disk in my possession until their printing. Patricia did the same with the essay questions.

The changing of the tapes was also personally accomplished by me. This may have led to some poor sound quality at the beginning of the second lecture; however, there is also the problem of having to use a Russian machine for the Auditorium sound system and a modern Japanese machine for the dubbing.

The tapes used were purchased locally, but the dubbing was from the originals sent from UCLA: the order of the lectures were changed, not the lectures themselves.

2. If there is a general feeling that the sound quality of the second lecture (I replayed the beginning at a lower volume) would be a factor in some worthy student being ignored, I suggest that we drop the 10 questions based on the lecture and use a total of 100 rather than the full 110 to create the point averages.

3. Very few of the takers today actually took notes during the taped lectures although they were told to do so in the

instructions. Does the academic culture here prepare students to be aware that note-taking is necessary? Do they realize that that might include noting down the taped instructor's name and the times and rooms he mentions? How do they differentiate the needed from the unneeded information?

4. Because we have always used new essay topics (and these are a major part of the test), any 'cheating' on the multiple-choice section would be readily noticeable. Only a truly exceptional and unbalanced student would be able to compose a wonderful essay and fail the listening and reading portion of the test (this student might be a great loss to AUA; the opposite number would be less exceptional, but would also be a less likely candidate for AUA).

5. The essays are read by at least two and if necessary three readers. This allows for little subjective insensitivity, but it also means that the training for and the process of correcting the exam is very time consuming: a great deal of intellectual energy goes into maintaining your critical faculties through a reading of 100 essays on similar topics while having to argue each mark (there are three components to each grade) with at least one other reader.

I would like to substitute a similar double-blind oral interview for the listening portion of the test. We would keep a reading component, and give the test over two days so as not to exhaust the applicants and the staff.

6. There is no possibility that a truly incapable student would get through the test and/or the first day of English classes undetected, but there are greater possibilities that truly capable students go unrecognized because portions of the test are insensitive to local academic cultural norms (see the case of note-taking above). We need more rigorous cut-off points determined by a more rigorous, but fairer test.

Does the test allow us to accurately place students in classes for the Fall term? It does, but it cannot accurately show what we have taught them during that time (they are studying specific disciplines in preparation for very specific GRE and GMAT tests) and it can cause us to overlook some worthy students.

**7. Finally, with most of the important decision makers of AUA planning to be here in late Autumn for graduation, I suggest that we have a general meeting about English testing. There is a great deal to be hashed over and I also suggest that Russ Campbell be there for the meeting. Patricia is in accord with me on this last point.**

**I think this group of applicants will prove some of the most promising that we will ever have the pleasure of instructing and I look forward to my classes in the Autumn.**

**Virgil Strohmeyer**

**cc Michael Kouchakdjian  
Russ Campbell  
Theony Condos  
Mihran Agbabian**